

This is A Few Forgotten Women Story



This story was written, in September 2024, as one of a series resulting from the 'A Few Forgotten Women Friday' collaborative research project, investigating the lives of pupils at the Royal Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb Poor (later The Royal School for the Deaf), Margate, Kent and The West of England Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, Exeter, Devon.

Elizabeth Palmer

Elizabeth Palmer was baptised in All Saints, Okehampton, Devon on 19 December 1830¹. Her parents, Samuel Palmer and Hannah Macey Blatchford, had married in Nymet Tracey, Devon on 28 March 1826². Samuel was described as a Yeoman when Elizabeth was baptised. Elizabeth was the eldest of Samuel and Hannah's four children. Her siblings were William b. 1833, Agnes Hannah in 1836 and Mary Ann in 1840³.

Samuel Palmer was a farmer on the 1841 census⁴. He, his wife Hannah, and children were living at Wigney Farm, Okehampton. Elizabeth, however, was a pupil of the West of England Institution for the Deaf and Dumb in St. Leonards,

Exeter⁵. She appears by name in the Minutes of the Gentlemen's Committee in January 1839⁶ - Elizabeth Palmer 8 years of Okehampton, Devon was recommended by J. Rogers, R. Ottley and D. Ottley. The Reverend J.R. Whyte provided a certificate and a medical was provided by J.W. Thorne. According to the Annual Report of 1845 for the institution, Elizabeth attended the school from 1839 until approximately 1843⁷. Her brother William also attended the school from 1841-1847. There is an entry in the accounts book for 1842 for William and Elizabeth for the amount of £4 0s 7d. The aim of institutions like the one Elizabeth and William attended was to equip the students with communication skills along with those which would enable them to be employed. Elizabeth, and the other girls, would have been taught sewing, dressmaking and domestic skills. From the Annual Reports, Elizabeth was residing with her parents in 1845 as was William in 1848. However, in 1849 it was noted that Elizabeth was a dressmaker and William was a farmer.

Elizabeth and brother William were living with their parents and sisters at Wigney Farm on the 1851 and 1861 census⁸. In 1861, it was recorded that they were deaf and dumb from birth. Neither of their sisters was similarly afflicted. Samuel Palmer was a farmer of 50 acres employing 2 labourers in 1851. By 1861, the farm had increased to 400 acres and he was employing 3 labourers.

The 1871 census lists the family living at Estrayer Park, Okehampton⁹. It was a farm of 450 acres. Samuel was now 76, still farming and employing two labourers, a boy and an indoor servant. Daughter Agnes had married Richard Madge and they were living with Samuel, Hannah, Elizabeth, William and Mary Ann.

Hannah Macey Palmer nee Blatchford, aged 78, died at her home, Estrayer Park, on 23 December 1872¹¹. Elizabeth continued to live with her widowed father and unmarried sister Mary Ann. In 1881, they had moved to Garden Cottage. Samuel was blind, Elizabeth was working as a dressmaker and Mary Ann was keeping house. After Samuel's death, on 20 September 1882¹², Elizabeth returned to Estrayer Park to live with her married sister Agnes and her unmarried brother William. Elizabeth, aged 60, was still working as a dressmaker in 1891 but was living on her own means in 1901¹³. Aged 80, Elizabeth was boarding with the Baily family in Exbourne in 1911¹⁴. Elizabeth died on 20 December 1917 at her nephew's home in Heavitree, Exeter¹⁵. She was aged 87, late of Estrayer Park.

Sources

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